

# **Committee on Resources**

## **Full Committee**

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### **Witness Statement**

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#### **Testimony Of**

**DR. ALAN WENTZ, PH.D.**

**GROUP MANAGER FOR CONSERVATION,**

**DUCKS UNLIMITED, INC.**

**BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES**

**NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA**

**MAY 3, 1999**

#### **Testimony**

**Dr. Alan Wentz, Ph.D.**

**Group Manager for Conservation,**

**Ducks Unlimited, Inc.**

**Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Resources**

**New Orleans, Louisiana**

**May 3, 1999**

I would like to thank the Chairman, especially you Congressman Tauzin, and the other members of the Committee for inviting me to testify on behalf of Ducks Unlimited, Inc. regarding this important issue.

Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) is the world's largest, private waterfowl habitat conservation organization with over a million supporters in the United States. DU's mission is to fulfill the annual life cycle needs of North American waterfowl by protecting, enhancing, restoring and managing important wetlands and associated uplands. Since its founding in 1937, DU has conserved more than 8.8 million acres of prime wildlife habitat

in all 50 states, each of the Canadian provinces and in key areas of Mexico. Some 900 species of wildlife, including many threatened and endangered species, use DU projects during some phase of their life cycles.

We applaud the proposed reinvestment of Outer Continental Shelf oil revenues in the conservation of our natural resources. Enactment of this concept will leave a lasting legacy on the landscape of America's wild and natural places. Both versions of the legislation being heard today recognize the desire of the American people to maintain healthy landscapes for themselves and the wildlife that is so much a part of our heritage.

### **The Approach is Visionary**

Ducks Unlimited has always recognized the value of habitat-based conservation to the long-term health of wildlife populations, and, in fact, to the well being of human populations as well. These bills provide substantial amounts of funding to carry out essential habitat conservation for an array of wildlife species in a way that has never been feasible before.

State natural resource agencies are on the front line for conservation on the landscape level. They manage land and are very responsive to the citizenry. The Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) provides much needed funds to states to bolster their conservation programs. An investment in these programs is an investment in locally directed, effective, and responsible land and wildlife stewardship. By building upon the support that states have historically received from hunters and anglers, CARA recognizes that a grand variety of wildlife benefits from conservation and the program will help equip state wildlife agencies to use a variety of conservation strategies. This kind of investment in our country's infrastructure for natural resource management is absolutely essential to our future. State wildlife agencies have been given many new responsibilities over the last few decades. It is time for us to provide new sources of revenue to pay for these responsibilities.

In addition to land acquisition, which is a valuable conservation tool, CARA will provide the resources for states to work with private landowners to find incentive-based, non-regulatory answers to conservation problems. Ducks Unlimited works with landowners across the North American continent and we believe strongly in private property rights and values. Because of that we work with voluntary land protection and management programs where landowners are finding ways to preserve the integrity and health of their property, while retaining ownership of the land. Our efforts include assistance in restoring wetlands, native grasses, and natural forests for the benefit of the landowner and wildlife. There is a very high demand for these kinds of assistance. One of our beliefs is grounded in the fact that when you find land management practices that benefit both wildlife and the economic interests of the landowner you can expect those practices to continue without government or private subsidies.

One of the tools we at DU increasingly use is the voluntary conservation easement. In fact, landowners are finding that conservation easements are, in many cases, the best way to secure wildlife habitat and healthy landscapes into the future, while keeping the land economically productive. DU holds conservation easements in many states. Our focus is on "working" lands that produce agricultural crops, timber or other products. The goal is to keep the wildlife habitat and its private stewardship in place for the future and to do that we all must recognize that the landowner needs to create an income stream from the land. Hopefully one of the ways state wildlife agencies will use a portion of the funds they receive under CARA is to facilitate creation of these types of easements.

One of the most contentious issues in conservation today is what to do about endangered species. CARA provides resources for conservation of habitats before populations become perilously low. History has shown

that species that are hunted and have sufficient management in place tend to be kept in abundance. On the other end of the continuum, species that are classed as endangered also receive a lot of management attention. But the majority of our wildlife species fall between these two groups and we historically have not had sufficient funds to manage these species. It is sensible to take actions that preclude the need for implementing controversial and expensive recovery plans once a species is listed. To paraphrase the motto of a Neotropical bird conservation effort--"Partners in Flight"- CARA will help us keep common species common.

CARA would also provide states with funding for wildlife education and nature-based tourism, an important aspect of conservation in today's society. Natural resources conservation efforts that also educate the public about the values and benefits of those resources have the greatest potential for long-term success. The American public spends 100 billion dollars each year in wildlife-related recreation. CARA will enhance that by helping to maintain healthy wildlife populations and provide for appropriate access, education, and related services.

DU applauds the authors of CARA for including provisions that make the interest earned from Title III monies available to the North American Wetlands Conservation Act program. Habitat conservation under NAWCA has been widely acclaimed in the conservation community. Providing additional funds to this proven, successful program is a wise investment since an average of \$2.3 non-federal dollars matches every federal dollar committed. NAWCA is one of the most successful partnership programs ever put into operation and new funds invested here will continue that effort and enhance the objectives of both of these important congressional actions.

Finally, CARA is visionary in that it recognizes that landscapes rejuvenated and enhanced for wildlife help ensure the quality of life for Americans today and tomorrow because we all depend on the same clean and abundant water, air, and soil.

### **Action is Timely**

Right now, there is an unprecedented climate of cooperation and integration among bird conservation initiatives. Never before has the conservation community been poised to provide for the habitat needs of such a large and diverse group of organisms. Science based, landscape driven conservation plans for all songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds are being put into place as we enter the new millenium. However, not only are we finalizing solid plans for the conservation of hundreds of species, but these plans will be integrated through efforts like the North American Bird Conservation Initiative to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of every dollar spent.

Since 1986, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, through partnerships known as joint ventures, has been one of the great success stories in conservation history. Through these partnerships, public and private funds are combined to achieve results that are much greater than the sum of the parts. Following this lead, new partnerships are forming to deliver habitat conservation that benefits all birds. CARA will provide increased public funds to facilitate the success of these new and important partnerships.

### **Cooperation is Important**

It is our hope that the legislation that emerges from Congress can respond to the interests of both bills being discussed today. We believe it is healthy for the Committee to operate in a climate of cooperation to create final legislation that can be supported by the broadest group of organizations and individuals. We believe it

is essential that Title III of H.R. 701 should be part of the final product.

Thank you for inviting Ducks Unlimited to participate today. Ducks Unlimited supports the concept of these bills because we, like so many others, have a deep and abiding desire to see a healthy and thriving American landscape that provides for the needs of wildlife and people now and for our grandchildren and future generations.

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